




# Shoggoth bread, the ideal recipe



Chaz

 [cvillette](https://cvillette.livejournal.com/)

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2008-03-08 09:21:00

**MOOD:** 😊 happy

**MUSIC:** Andrew Bird - Yawny At The Apocalypse

Elmer is teaching me patience. You do not get instant results from a shoggoth: it takes time, and the ability to walk away and trust that the wee beastie will do his work without supervision and prodding.

And I think I have, with a little experimenting, created the perfect shoggoth recipe for sandwich-style sliceable bread, as opposed to chewy bread you rip up in chunks and soak in soup. (Elmer also makes excellent rip up in chunks bread! he is versatile!)

Here is how you make both kinds of sourdough:

The day before you want to make bread, take your starter from the fridge. Divide and feed it, as you normally would, being sure to reserve some to go \*back\* in the fridge and burble there. (burble!) What I do is take a cup of starter out of the starter, put it in a bowl, and feed both it and the starter in the starter cannister 2/3 cup of filtered water and 1 cup of unbleached all-purpose flour, stirring them in. (King Arthur brand.) The starter that is being saved as the mother colony (boy shoggoths can be mothers too: they're handy like that) sits out covered for a little while (an hour or two) to get established (when it starts bubbling and growing is time), and then goes--pop--back in the chill chest.

The other shoggoth is the working colony. That goes in a nice big heavy bowl and gets fed as the starter does and covered over with plastic wrap, but when the starter goes back in the fridge, the working colony (which has probably doubled in size and is burping) gets divided in half (for two portions of a cup and a half or so) and then, we decide the fate of each. (Most people will probably discard one half of the fed shoggoth, unless they are baking for friends or a big family or a party. I usually just make two different bready things. ("Usually!" he says. The relationship has already fallen into routine. Alas, poor Elmer. Already taken for granted, and he only moved in in February.))

Okay, so here's some things you can do with your divided shoggoth:

### Basic Chewy Sourdough Recipe

Take **half a fed shoggoth**. Dilute him with **1.5 cups of lukewarm water** (test it on your wrist, as you would for a baby bottle.) Into this horrible whitish slurry, mix **3 cups of high-protein bread flour**. (You can use all-purpose flour, but your bread will not be as toothsome.) Cover the bowl with Saran Wrap, put it in the coldest part of your kitchen, and *walk away*. (You can also put it in the fridge if your kitchen isn't cold.)

Eight to twelve hours later, come back. Clear off the area of your kitchen table you will be working on, wash it, and **if it is a wooden table, oil it**. Seriously. With food-grade oil. Olive oil is what I use. Shoggoths are highly hygroscopic, and they will suck the moisture right out of the wood. Don't worry about the table being greasy afterwards, because the shoggoth will eat up every bit of that oil and be happy for it. What you want is for the wood to look shiny and polished, not slimy: I just wipe the oil on with a paper towel.

Okay. Now go wash your hands.

And now, take **2 cups of the same bread flour you used up there** ^^ and pile them on the table. Sprinkle **a tablespoon plus a teaspoon of coarse kosher salt** or **a tablespoon of ground sea-salt over the flour**. (These will give the end product slightly different flavors.) Do **not be tempted to leave out the salt**, unless you are under doctor's orders. Your bread will taste like ass without it, and this cannot be fixed later. If you have done your *mise en place*, the salt is sitting right there in a little Japanese soy sauce dish, already measured, right next to the oregano and the rosemary plants. So you will not forget it.

Also, leave your flour cannister on the table, open and off to the side. You will want it later.

The next instructions assume you are statistically predictable. If you are left-handed, reverse them. If you are ambidextrous, decide now which your dominant hand will be today.

Stick your left hand in the flour and get a good coat on it, as if you were chalking up. Remove your left hand from the flour. Cleverly, in the process of flouring your hand, you have made a little well in

the flour! Good work!

With your right hand, uncover the shoggoth bowl, lift it, and begin slowly pouring the shoggoth into the well in the flour. There will be more shoggoth than flour. Don't panic. Just keep pushing flour lightly over the shoggoth with your floury left hand, and pouring shoggoth with your right. Do not let the shoggoth escape to the floor! Floor shoggoth is exempt from the thirty second rule!

Eventually, when you are nearly out of shoggoth, stick your floury left hand in the bowl and scrape the last iota of shoggoth from the bowl. Set the bowl aside.

Now is the time to remember you forgot to turn on the answering machine, because it's too late now!

You should have a much smaller pile of flour, now, and a much less runny shoggoth. If you did it right, though, the shoggoth stayed on the flour, and did not stick to the table.

With both hands, begin kneading the flour and the shoggoth together. I knead by flipping the top edge of the shoggoth towards me with the fingers of one hand, and then pressing the folded edges together with the heel of the opposite hand. Then I rotate a quarter-turn away from the hand that is doing the flipping, flip again, and knead again. Your dominant hand should be doing the flipping, most likely, or you can switch as you get bored. It makes no difference to the shoggoth.

The shoggoth will begin consuming the flour. As the shoggoth consumes the flour, you will want to add more, probably one or two more cups, depending on how wet your shoggoth is. Don't worry about the dough and flour that stick to your hands and the table; the shoggoth will get around to those too. As it matures and becomes tackier, it will begin sucking up everything in sight--flies, rings, the oil off the table, the water from the wood (if you forgot to oil), scraps of paper... and any remaining bits of flour and dough. Knead and knead and knead. Sing a little song. Dance with your left foot. Knead some more.

A magical. alchemical process will follow, in which the shoggoth and the flour will merge, and you will be left with a beautiful stretchy slightly tacky dough that will remind you of the Plasticine of your youth, except springy. When it feels like soft, relaxed, slightly moist flesh, it's ready to go. (If you are a woman, touch your breast. If you are a man, find a friendly woman and ask if you can touch her breast. That's what it's supposed to feel like. Not

hard and stiff! Soft and voluptuous!)

### **Failure Modes:**

-Adding too much flour. Eventually, the dough will become cohesive and soft and stretchy and beautiful. It will stop sticking to the table or your hands (unless you let it rest, in which case it will stick a little) and it will suck up all the flour and scraps of dough from everywhere, leaving you with a clean table and mostly clean hands. There is a tendency among novice bread-bakers to hasten this process by adding more flour to dry out the dough, but you will only make it tough.

-Underkneading. One way to tell if you have kneaded enough is to pinch off a little piece of dough, roll it up into a ball, and then stretch it gently between your fingers. If it makes a translucent "window," it's done.

### **Good tricks:**

If the gluten isn't developing fast enough, let the dough micro-rest for three or five minutes. Just walk away for a little bit and go wash out the bowl now, instead of later, or something. Then come back and knead some more. Sometimes this seems to help a recalcitrant shoggoth get in the mood.

### **Back to the recipe!**

Okay. Now you have a lump of bread dough. Leave it on your (shiny clean) table. Take the bowl to the sink and wash it out, and wash the little crusty bits off your wrists, too. Shoggoths like to cling in your arm hairs. Be warned. Dry your hands and the bowl on a kitchen towel and put a little more olive oil in the bowl (a teaspoon or so). Then pick up the shoggoth, which is now elevated to the status of bread dough, and shape it into a ball with your hands. (It will probably stick to the table a little now, which is okay--it has started to relax.) Put the ball in the bowl (the pellet with the poison is in the vessel with the pestle.) and turn it over to coat both sides with oil. Now take your plastic wrap from before (you didn't throw it away, did you?) and cover the bowl.

Let the dough rise for one to two hours. Come back. Take a baking sheet and prep it with cooking spray and cornmeal, or with a sil-pat.

Do not punch down or re-knead the dough, as you might for yeast

bread. This is a sensitive, artistic shoggoth, and it wants to know its hard work is appreciated. Pet it and praise it for rising so nicely, and then pinch the ball of dough in half and shape each half into a little round loaf. (They will be shockingly tiny. Fear not! Be bold!) and place the loaves on your baking sheet. Set them in a warmish corner, cover with a damp cloth, and walk away again.

Come back in an hour or two and check. If they have doubled in size, they are ready to have their tops slit with a sharp knife in artistic patterns (this is fun!) and then go in a preheated 400 degree oven until they are golden-brown and beautiful. This will probably be about twenty-five to thirty minutes, but I start checking them at twenty. (My original recipe said 450 degrees for 20 minutes, but that kept making scorched loaves.)

How you tell when they are done: experience, mostly. They feel lighter when cooked, and they smell different, and they have a distinctive sound when thumped, and the outside is hard all over, without soft spots, even on the bottom. The first few times, you can actually pick a sacrificial loaf and when you think it is done, cut a slice off. If it's not cooked, you will find a doughy bit in the middle, and you can pop the bread back in the oven for five more minutes. This has aesthetic consequences, but none for flavor, really.

You can get a crunchier shinier crust by spraying them with water a couple of times while they bake.

**failure mode:** You burned it! Oven too hot, or cooking time too long.

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### **Shoggoth variations:**

Okay, with the other half of the shoggoth, you might want to make a sandwichier bread. The trick for this is that when you make the sponge (that's the technical term for the stage between fed starter and dough--the sponge is the runnier state before the salt goes in, and the reason you hold back the salt is to give the shoggoth a chance to get well-established before you start introducing poisons to its environment) you use a **half-cup of lukewarm scalded whole milk** in addition to **one cup of filtered water**. (Filtered water because shoggoths do not like chlorine.)

You can also make saffron bread (I tried this and it was nummy).

On the first day of breadmaking, when you start the whole process, scald your milk and sprinkle a couple of pinches of saffron in it, and then put the saffronized milk in the fridge overnight to infuse. The next day, bring this milk back up to temperature (lukewarm!) and use it in the recipe.

\*\*\*

**Bagels and pretzels** are made exactly the same way, except you add **1 teaspoon of sugar** and **three tablespoons of melted butter** to the dough, and they only get one real rising. Then you shape them and boil them in water to which baking soda and kosher salt have been added.

The boiling process is just a par-boiling. You pop them in one or two at a time, make sure they don't stick to the bottom of the pot, and when they float back up drain them off and then put them on a baking sheet and sprinkle the wet sticky bagels or pretzels with kosker salt. Then bake in that 400 degree oven until done, which will be about 15-25 minutes.

\*\*\*

*Phew.*

**TAGS:** [recipes](#)



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### Three things!

1) Okay, O., She Wants Revenge = yes. It's like the Eighties rose up from the grave and came looking

### Experimental Whole Wheat Green Chile Robot Bread #1

Yes, baking with your hands is more fun. And the results have a better texture, and taste better.

### [locked] Dream Journal

All right, unconscious mind. We're coming to an accommodation. If the dreams are you cleaning

31 comments

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 [cvillette](#)

[March 8 2008, 15:36:24 UTC](#)

[COLLAPSE](#)

That's either too much yeast, dough not kneaded enough, not punched down properly (if you are using a yeast recipe), or risen too hot/too long.

Although boules, in particular, seem prone to develop a big air bubble just under the topmost layer of dough (because the shaping of the round loaf makes kind of a dough spiral rather than a homogeneous loaf--which makes it springier and more toothsome, but also means it has layers) and I think the solution to that is to make sure when you slash the top, you slash deeply.



[!\[\]\(feabb98897b440bc8695a03336a6e2df\_img.jpg\) inaurolillium](#)

[March 8 2008, 22:06:52 UTC](#)

[COLLAPSE](#)

There was a trick I learned in class, for forming rolls of dough-balls-to-be-turned-into-flatbread, which was to make the ball by pulling the dough into a smooth surface on one side, forming a pucker at the bottom (it's similar to forming shu mai, actually, if you've ever done that). Then, place the pucker under the outside edge of your hand, with the mass of the ball rising up under your palm, and roll the pucker against the table until it forms a nice tight tail, and the rest of the surface of the ball is perfectly smooth. Plonk the ball on top of the tail. If I understand it correctly (and remember, I'm a cook, not a baker), this should help with the dough-spiral problem.

And Chaz, you rock at writing recipes.



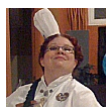
[!\[\]\(3cb60d42b10e53f9522bb0b392c1c4cd\_img.jpg\) cvillette](#)

[March 8 2008, 22:12:04 UTC](#)

[COLLAPSE](#)

I kind of do something like that. I will have to try rolling it on the table. I didn't know that trick!

(Thank you.)



[!\[\]\(f219cfc00b8db0cd1a81ae1fc9afaf28\_img.jpg\) inaurolillium](#)

[March 8 2008, 22:42:52 UTC](#)

[COLLAPSE](#)

I was taught that trick by a chef shaped like a tennis ball, who used to love to scare the crap out of me. He's pretty awesome, actually.



[!\[\]\(465772ce2fc0e39b7001e2580b915cc2\_img.jpg\) cvillette](#)

[March 8 2008, 19:36:15 UTC](#)

[COLLAPSE](#)

Oh! Or dough too wet. Basically, it boils down to "not enough gluten."

*Deleted comment*



[!\[\]\(f8f63333e9701d869b3a17c610b5636e\_img.jpg\) cvillette](#)

[March 8 2008, 22:20:08 UTC](#)

[COLLAPSE](#)

That's the spirally bit that makes it springy. You may be getting air trapped between the layers? It needs to be pulled *really tight*.

 [inaurolillium](#) has a trick below that might work?

*Deleted comment*



 [cvillette](#)

[March 8 2008, 22:36:23 UTC](#) [COLLAPSE](#)

Also, FWIW, shoggothy bread seems less prone to air holes than yeast bread.

*Deleted comment*




 [cvillette](#)

[March 8 2008, 16:31:39 UTC](#) [COLLAPSE](#)

It used to get me into trouble when I was writing lab reports/papers/dissertations.

But here, my reports will never be as interesting as Duke's, so it's okay.

 [aerinha](#)

[March 8 2008, 16:37:28 UTC](#) [COLLAPSE](#)

You are my baking guru!

Any idea what to do with a pound of freshly made goat cheese? :) Besides gobble it down, of course.

 [cvillette](#)

[March 8 2008, 16:42:34 UTC](#) [COLLAPSE](#)

Goat cheese tarts in filo pastry, topped with sauteed mushrooms and onions?

 [aerinha](#)

[March 8 2008, 21:04:13 UTC](#) [COLLAPSE](#)

Sounds like a good plan. Anything with sauteed mushrooms and onions is a good plan in my book!

 [cjtremlett](#)

[March 8 2008, 18:19:11 UTC](#) [COLLAPSE](#)

Give it to me? \*eg\*

I don't just love goat cheese, I worship it. It is divine.

My suggestion would be add sun-dried tomatos, black olives (both chopped fine), and whatever spices sound good, stick it on some bread (haven't tried this with homemade sour dough, but I bet it'd be yummy!) and grill it to the point the bread is brown and crunchy on the outside but not hard, and the cheese is warm but not enough to burn your tongue.

 [aerinha](#)



March 8 2008, 21:06:11 UTC    COLLAPSE


Mmmmm.... Warm goat cheese sounds terrific. I don't have access to a grill but I bet I could do this in the oven with one of the baguettes I bought (no breadmaking this weekend!).  
I ate some of the chevre this morning for breakfast, spread on baguette, drizzled with honey.  
Oh-so-tasty!

 cjtremlett

March 8 2008, 23:20:48 UTC    COLLAPSE

Baguette is actually what I've had the goat cheese concoction on! So I know that works. You can do it in an oven, too. Whatever you need to do to wind up with crispy bread and warm cheese!



 sprrwhwk

March 9 2008, 19:51:43 UTC    COLLAPSE

This is awesome. I've been wanting to play with sourdough, but it's not really practical until I have a place of my own (soon! soon!) and regular free time (err...). I'll have to revisit this recipe.

You could totally write a book -- possible titles include Baking With The Deep Ones, Shoggoth on Bread, Perfect Bread the Squamous Way, The Bread Man Was Not Meant To Bake, something like that... :-)



**The Bread Man Was Not Meant To Bake**

 cvillette

March 10 2008, 01:04:43 UTC    COLLAPSE

WIN!



 colomon

March 21 2008, 11:32:16 UTC    COLLAPSE

I think I found a failure mode you didn't mention. When you say "begin slowly pouring the shoggoth into the well in the flour", what I had did not pour terribly well; it was more of a sticky, gooey mess. I even tried adding water before pouring on my second batch, but the end results were still much less moist than you describe.

The end result sure tastes good, though. And I'm pretty sure even with my technique still off I can successfully make pizza dough. Thanks!



 cvillette

March 21 2008, 12:06:47 UTC    COLLAPSE


Well, no, it doesn't pour terribly well. If it's been in the fridge, it doesn't pour at all, more scoops, and I should have been clear on that.

Sticky, gooey mess sounds just about right. Amazing how I didn't realize my base assumptions until you pointed them out to me!

When you've finished kneading, though, and it has the extra flour in it, it should feel kind of... firm, but

velvety, and only sticky if you let your hand rest on it for longer than a second or two. It shouldn't stick to your hand while you're kneading, in other words, or to the table, and it should have sucked up all the flour and little dough bits.




 [colomon](#)

[March 21 2008, 13:19:40 UTC](#)   [COLLAPSE](#)

It wasn't in the fridge, it still needed scooping. But if that's expected, then maybe the problem was in my kneading technique? Hmmmm....



 [colomon](#)

[March 21 2008, 13:19:59 UTC](#)   [COLLAPSE](#)

BTW, it tasted fantastic toasted this morning.



 [cvillette](#)

[March 21 2008, 13:25:33 UTC](#)   [COLLAPSE](#)

Maybe. High gluten flour takes longer kneading...?



 [colomon](#)

[March 21 2008, 13:32:52 UTC](#)   [COLLAPSE](#)

Hmmm. Okay, I think I know what I need to try differently next time.

Of course, I have three loaves of bread to eat before I can justify making more. And it will take another day or two for my arms to recover from the kneading. Ouch.



[\*\*three loaves of bread.\*\*](#)

 [cvillette](#)

[March 21 2008, 13:44:37 UTC](#)   [COLLAPSE](#)

Hmm. Sounds like a good excuse for a party to me. Or hostess gifts.

(You could take up climbing. I hardly notice the kneading anymore.)

 [glinda\\_w](#)

[April 7 2008, 01:27:11 UTC](#)   [COLLAPSE](#)

I'm curious - is your oven gas or electric? (If gas, I'm going to be envious. I haven't had a gas stove since...  
\*thinks\* 1978, and I still miss cooking on them. No spillovers on top, ever...)

My first batch had a semi-failure mode of taking waaaaay longer to bake and still not getting nicely golden. Am going to up the temp to 450 for the batch that's rising right now, and hope that solves it...


(My oven overheats by 25°, but I turn the 'stat down to compensate, and have an oven thermometer in there permanently, so I can check and see if it's deviating further.)

 [cvillette](#)

[April 7 2008, 10:38:48 UTC](#)   [COLLAPSE](#)

Electric!

Also, if that doesn't work, try moving your racks around. It's possible the bread was sitting in a cool spot.

 [manywaters](#)


[May 8 2008, 00:46:59 UTC](#)   [COLLAPSE](#)

Shoggoth photos?

 [cvillette](#)

[May 8 2008, 00:51:55 UTC](#)   [COLLAPSE](#)

Mostly I don't photograph my shoggoth, but there is [this](#).

 [manywaters](#)

[May 8 2008, 00:59:18 UTC](#)   [COLLAPSE](#)

Have you listened to Shoggoth on the Roof?

[Here via coffeem](#)

 [estara](#)

[May 8 2008, 12:21:44 UTC](#)   [COLLAPSE](#)

I may never make my own bread but I love you for your Court Jester reference.

<3



[Re: Here via coffeem](#)

 [cvillette](#)

[May 8 2008, 12:22:52 UTC](#)   [COLLAPSE](#)

Thank you! Obscure jokes are better shared.

 [rikibeth](#)

[September 20 2008, 19:10:24 UTC](#)   [COLLAPSE](#)

I have just yesterday acquired a baby shoggoth from [matociguale](#). I have split him and fed him, with the eventual goal of having shoggoth-crust pizza for tomorrow's dinner.

I have the minor advantage of being a professional baker, so I expect I'll be able to get good results kneading it in my KitchenAid, instead of by hand, until I've reached the point of shaping the pizza dough.

Yay for shoggoths!

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yes. It's like the Eighties rose up  
from the grave and came looking

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more fun. And the results have a  
better texture, and taste better.

### [locked] Dream Journal

All right, unconscious mind. We're  
coming to an accommodation. If  
the dreams are you cleaning